

Kenosis as a model for interreligious dialogue

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Introduction

I would like to start with a story. The context of the story is The Gambia in West Africa, a predominantly Muslim country – 95 percent of the people is Muslim, while about 3 percent is Christian – where I lived and worked as an advisor for Christian Muslim Relations for the Gambia Christian Council from 1993 – 1999. During my stay I became fascinated with the long history of Christianity in this country – the first missionaries arrived in the late 1450s - and the even longer history of Islam in the country. And I wondered how these two communities had related to each other throughout the centuries. This interest resulted in a study of Christianity in The Gambia.¹

In the course of my research, in 1998, I made a fieldtrip to Kristikunda and Saare Yesu, villages built as a result of an Anglican attempt in the 1940s and 1950s to establish a Christian village in a Muslim rural environment, close to the Senegalese border, near Tambakunda. It was an experiment that nearly ruined the Anglican mission because of its expenses and despite high investments of finance and personnel failed to establish an enduring Christian community among the Fula people. The story I would like to tell you relates to this fieldtrip.

In December 1998 the Anglican evangelist James Baldeh and an elderly Fula man called Pa Baldeh, who in the past had worked for the Anglican mission as a dispenser, accompanied the author of this article to the ruins of Kristikunda and Saare Yesu. After we had greeted the alkalo of Jaokunda and exchanged the traditional gift of kola nuts, we visited the remnants of what once had been a flourishing Christian village. Only the foundations were left, hidden in man-high elephant grass. It was a depressing sight and after about 30 minutes we left.

In a local shop in Jaokunda, a bitik, we sat down for drink. An elderly Mandinka man approached us, greeted us and inquired after our mission. We explained what we had come to do and a conversation ensued. As a young man he had known Kristikunda very well, the man told us. And he began to describe the buildings, the many people who had lived in Kristikunda, the British and the Gambian missionaries, the car of the British dispenser 'Kotobill', the dignitaries who visited Kristikunda etc. His memory was remarkable. 'But you know what touched me most?' he said meditatively, 'that the bishop was willing to live here. More than all the buildings, the schools, the dispensary and all the good works the missionaries came to do, the fact that the bishop was willing to come and live with us here in this village, touched me. That he, who could have lived

¹ For a detailed description see M.T. Frederiks, *We have toiled all night: Christianity in The Gambia 1456-2000*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 2003.

in the capital city, was willing to live with us here in a village, so far away from the main road, so far away from comfort. That fact told me something about the love of the God of the Christians.'

The man was a Muslim. He had never considered becoming a Christian. But the willingness of an Anglican bishop who was prepared to live in an extremely poor rural village in the backwaters of The Gambia, communicated to this man the core message of the gospel. In this act he experienced that the love of God searches all, Christians and non-Christians, urban and rural people. He understood that the choice of this bishop to voluntarily lay aside comfort and convenience, conveyed the gospel message that all people are worthy in the eyes of God.

This tale has become a lead story in my missiological search for adequate models of how to relate to people of other faiths, especially in those situations where the Christian community forms a small minority.

Expansion

In the past Christians have used a variety of models for relating to people of other faiths. Most are still in use. Four dominant ones immediately come to mind: the models of expansion, of diakonia, of presence and of dialogue.

No doubt the model of expansion is the most common and well known. It is the model, which seeks the geographical and/or numerical extension of Christianity.² The 'other' is a person to be converted to Christianity, to be incorporated into the folds of the church. The model of expansion has played a key role throughout church history.³ Much of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary activity saw the geographical spread of Christianity and the subsequent conversion of individuals as the main missionary task.⁴ The model of expansion is still regarded important in the mainline churches but in more recent years other models of relating to

² K. Steenbrink, 'The mission of dialogue after 11 September 2001', *Exchange* 31/2 (2002), 115. Steenbrink draws a parallel between the Muslim conception of the world as being divided into the 'dar al-Islam' and the 'dar al-harb' and the Christian model of expansion, which divided the world into 'the church', and in 'partis infidelium.'

³ Timothy Yates detects this notion already in *The Acts of the Apostles*. T. Yates, *Christian missions in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, 7.

⁴ L. Sanneh, 'Should Christianity be missionary? An appraisal and an agenda', *Dialogue: a journal of theology*, 40/2 (summer 2001), 91. Also the church-growth movement of D.A. McGavran emphasises the model of expansion. Numbers and statistics play an important role in this movement. D.A. McGavran, *Understanding church growth*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1987, 7, 9. Yates has observed that the model of expansion was the predominant understanding of mission until well into the 20th century. The slogan of the missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910 was 'evangelisation of the world in this generation.' T. Yates, *Christian missions in the twentieth century*, 7 and 12. A Roman Catholic encyclical letter, called *Maximum Illud*, from 1919 breathes the same atmosphere. It was subtitled 'On spreading the Catholic faith throughout the world'. R.J. Schreiter, 'Changes in Roman Catholic attitudes towards proselytism and mission' in J.A. Scherer; S.B. Bevans, *New Directions in mission and evangelism 2: theological foundation*, Orbis books, Maryknoll 1994, 114, 115.

people of other faiths have gradually gained in significance. Only certain evangelical circles continue to stress territorial expansion.⁵

Though it needs to be underlined that the spread of Christianity to a world-wide religion owes much to the model of expansion, some critical remarks must be made. Its close association with power throughout most of the Christian history has tainted the model. Expansion, the spread of Christianity, became expansionism: territorial expansion.⁶

Considering the efforts put into the model of expansion, both in human and material resources, it seems fair to state that the model of expansion was mainly successful in areas where Christianity met with adherents of the traditional religions. In areas where Christianity encountered people of one of the other world religions, rejection, hostility and alienation were the main results.

The model of expansion can also be criticised for its concept of communication. It works basically with a unilateral communication perception. The messenger has a pre-conceived message for the other and the other is a person who is to be evangelised. There is no room for a real encounter with the other, as a person who already has a religion and has a grasp of God. Rather, conversation with the other about his religion is mainly polemical.⁷ The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, however, shows that it is in conversion with each other, in an interrelational – and interreligious - setting, that both men receive a deeper grasp of the love of God.

Diakonia

Another model used to relate to people of other faiths is the model of diakonia. The model of diakonia stands for the fundamental choice of the church to identify itself with God's ministry of reconciliation of the world, in word and deed and attitude.⁸ In this model 'the other', Christian and non-Christian, is first all conceived as a person, who is included in God's mission of reconciliation and therefore he or she is a fellow human being to be served. In the 19th century diakonia abroad was mainly understood as a

⁵ Their language is often one of militancy. Some groups speak about 'targeting people' and 'penetrating every geographical and political border'. www.ad2000.org/histover.htm. Date: May 16 2003. In the Manila Manifesto of 1989, the participants (again) committed themselves to world-evangelism and called for the evangelisation of the world by AD 2000. The document speaks about 'the unreached' and 'the unevangelised'. See J.A. Scherer; S.B. Bevans, *New directions in mission and evangelization 1: basic statements 1974-1991*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1992, 256 and 303.

⁶ M.T. Thangaraj, *The common task: a theology of Christian mission*, Abdington Press, Nashville 1999, 107/108; L. Sanneh, 'Should Christianity be missionary?', 89, 90. See also D.J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Orbis Book, Maryknoll 1997, 228. Most writers see the *Padroado* as the classical example of the alliance between power and Christian expansion. But also in later centuries, for example during the colonial period in the 19th and 20th centuries, this link between power and Christian expansion continued. According to D. O'Connor the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) was established in 1701 following the 'English charters to "conquer, occupy and possess" lands occupied by "heathen and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world".' D. O'Connor e.o. (ed.) *Three centuries of mission: the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 1701-2000*, Continuum, London 2000, 7.

⁷ G.J. van der Kolm, *De verbeelding van de kerk*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer 2001, 47.

⁸ It finds its inspiration and ultimate foundation in the church's own reconciliation with God and her willingness and call to follow Christ in this holistic ministry of reconciliation.

ministry subservient to the spread of Christianity – and therefore mainly focussed on non-Christians - but from the 1950s onwards this changed to a more all-encompassing view of diakonia.⁹ This holistic interpretation of diakonia has led to the participation of the church in ministries of reconciliation, liberation and social change and has resulted in co-operation with people of other faiths.¹⁰ In evangelical circles this change in interpretation of diakonia is not shared and the subordination of diakonia to evangelisation is maintained.¹¹

Though presently mostly seen as an independent ministry of the church, during most of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries diakonia was mainly seen as instrumental in converting people to Christ. This has given diakonia an ambiguous reputation. Though people have appreciated the services of education and medical work, the catch of conversion has always lurked in the background. Despite this comment, however, it should be underlined that through the churches' dedication to education and medical work, millions of people have received tutoring and medical care. The impact of this fact cannot and should not be easily underestimated. Another backdrop of the model of diakonia is that it divides the world in 'givers' and 'receivers', in 'people who have' and 'people who have not'. This brings with it an inequality between those pursuing diakonia as service to society – often Christians - and those receiving the service - often people of other faiths. This inequality has made true communication and exchange difficult.

The more recent interpretation of the model of diakonia as a way to bring injustices such as corruption, the violation of human rights, the fate refugees and HIV/Aids patients to the notice of the larger public does not have this ambiguity and inequality. This new interpretation presents a clear sign of the church's ministry of service and

⁹ The model of diakonia is as old as the Christian community itself. Though the concept can be founded on both Old Testament and New Testament values, ultimately diakonia finds its model and inspiration in Jesus Christ as the great *Diakonos*. N.W. Proteous, 'The care for the poor in the Old Testament' in J.I. McCord and T.H.L. Parker (ed.), *Service in Christ: essays presented to Karl Barth on his 80th birthday*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1966, 27-36; C.E.B. Cranfield, 'Diakonia in the New Testament' in J.I. McCord and T.H.L. Parker (ed.), *Service in Christ: essays presented to Karl Barth on his 80th birthday*, 37-48. From the 1950s onward the theological foundation of diakonia changed. Within WCC circles diakonia was no longer first of all grounded in the signs and miracles of Jesus Christ during his life-time but in the totality of Jesus' life and ministry in the service of reconciliation: Jesus as the servant who gave his life as a ransom for all. See: D. Bosch, 'In search of a new evangelical understanding', in B. Nichols, *In word and deed: evangelism and social responsibility*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1994, 79; W.A. Whitehouse, 'Christological understanding', in J.I. McCord and T.H.L. Parker (ed.), *Service in Christ: essays presented to Karl Barth on his 80th birthday*, 155. In the Roman Catholic Church a similar development took place. J.M.R. Tillard observed that diakonia belonged to the very *being* of the church. See J.M.R. Tillard, 'The mission of the Councils of Churches', *The Ecumenical Review* 45/3 (1993), 272. This has implied a much more holistic and encompassing approach of diakonia. It was more than being 'just service', which so often had a 'from top to bottom', a 'from rich to poor' approach. K. Bediako, 'Theological reflections' in T. Yamamori, B.L. Myers, K. Bediako, L. Reed (ed.), *Serving with the poor in Africa: cases in holistic ministry*, MARC, Monrovia 1996, 186, 187.

¹⁰ Most authors underline that this does not negate the dimension of spiritual reconciliation, quoting the words of Visser 't Hooft that the deepest need of people consists of not knowing or not having heard of Christ. E.g. F.J. Pop, *Zo is God bij de mensen*, Boekencentrum, Den Haag 1967, 49.

¹¹ J.A. Scherer; S.B. Bevans, *New directions in mission and evangelization I: basic statements 1974-1991*, 278, 279.

reconciliation in society and offers possibilities for co-operation with people of other faiths.

The model of presence

A third model of relating to people of other faiths has been the model of presence. This is the model, which interprets witness as the silent testimony of living and working with and among people in the name of Christ, as a sign of Christ's involvement with and presence in the world.¹² In this model 'the other, his/her religion or his/her choice to refrain from religion, and his/her culture are respected for what they are and an attempt is made to witness to Christ in an incarnational, non-confrontational way by sharing the ups and downs of life.

There are two different traditions within the Christian heritage that emphasise the importance of presence. The oldest is the monastic tradition. According to Hoeberichts, Francis of Assisi was among the first to stress the value of presence in a Muslim society, though the word presence is not used in his writings.¹³ Cardinal Charles Lavigerie of Algiers, founder of the missionary society the White Fathers does explicitly mention the concept.¹⁴ Lavigerie instructed his missionaries to see inculturation and presence as pre-requisites for mission.¹⁵ An age mate of Lavigerie, Charles de Foucauld reiterated the importance of presence and inculturation for mission. He saw an inculturated presence, which took the shape of friendship and service, as a form of 'pre-evangelism'.¹⁶ Max Warren, another advocate of presence taking the form of friendship, summarised Foucauld's position as 'being *present* among people with a presence willed and intended as a witness of the love of Christ.'¹⁷ To Warren 'presence'

¹² See for certain aspects of this definition C.E. Shenk, *A relevant theology of presence*, Mission Focus Pamphlet, Elkhart 1982, 34.

¹³ In chapter 16 of his *Regula non bullata* Francis of Assisi gives guidelines for his brothers who work among Muslims. He calls upon his brothers to live humbly and in submission in an Islamic society in order to live out a ministry of reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. J. Hoeberichts, *Franciscus en de Islam*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1994, 50; J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters and clashes: Islam and Christianity in history*, Vol. I A survey, PISAI, Rome 1990, 152, 153. Arnulf Camps disputes the idea that chapter 16 of the *Regula non bullata* should be interpreted in terms of 'presence.' See J. Hoeberichts and A. Camps, *Franciscus en de Islam*, Franciscans Studiecentrum, Utrecht 1991, 39.

¹⁴ According to Hoedemaker and others the term 'presence' as mission strategy was first used among the White Fathers. See L.A. Hoedemaker; A. Houtepen; T. Witvliet, *Oecumene als leerproces, inleiding in de oecumene*, Meinema, Zoetermeer 1993, 68.

¹⁵ M..J. Dor; J. Fisset, 'Pères Blancs et Soeurs Blanches, Tunisie et Algérie: fondation, développement, travaux apostolique' in H. Tessier (ed.), *Histoire des Chrétiens d'Afrique du Nord, Lybia, Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc*, Desclée, Paris 1991, 174.

¹⁶ Foucauld, who lived among the Tuareg in the Sahara, based his approach of presence on the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth during the first thirty years of his life. B. Bürkert-Engel, *Charles de Foucauld: Christliche Präsenz unter Muslime: Analyse und kritische Auseinandersetzung mit einer Islamrezeption in Biographie und Nachlass*, Lit, Münster 2000, 253, 254. See also C. Wright, 'Nazareth as model for mission in the life of Charles de Foucauld', *Mission Studies*, Vol. XIX, no. 1-37 (2002), 44 (37-52). See also J.A.C. Rullmann, "'Présence chrétienne" als legitieme zendingsmethode', *De Heerbaan, tijdschrift voor zendingswetenschap*, 24/5 en 6 (1971), 298.

¹⁷ M. Warren, *A theology of attention*, Diocesan Press, Madras 1971, 68.

indicated an attitude of openness and friendship, of listening before speaking and truly trying to understand the other in his/her otherness.¹⁸

The second tradition of presence gained prominence post-World War II Europe. In France 'presence' came to represent the way in which Roman Catholic priest-labourers endeavoured to restore contact with those parts of society from which the church had become estranged.¹⁹ This new tradition applied the concept of presence to the industrialised and secularised world from which the church seemed to have disappeared or seemed irrelevant, rather than to a predominantly Muslim setting.²⁰ The World Student Christian Federation, headed by Phillip Potter, took up the term 'presence' for use in the student world.²¹ Both among the priest-labourers and within WSCF circles the Christian presence implied a subversion of the *status quo*, in society as well as in the Christian community, and a continuous struggle for the restoration of human dignity.²² The Chang Mai meeting of the WCC honoured 'presence' as an authentic and distinct form of mission.²³

Presence indeed seems to be an effective model of relating to people of other faiths, in particular to Muslims. It is non-confrontational and contextual. It lives out the gospel rather than preaching it and takes the other person, including his/her religion, serious. In an evaluation of the concept of 'presence', the Dutch pastor Gerrit Jan van der Kolm, who works in city evangelism, points out that the model of presence presupposes a two-way process, which presumes that the truth is interrelational.²⁴ 'Presence', according to Van der Kolm is not a strategy, but an attitude of openness to search with the other for an authentic expression of the gospel in a certain context. In that sense 'presence' presupposes contextuality.²⁵

The presupposition of the model under consideration is, that presence is not 'just willed and intended as a sign of the love of Christ', but also recognisable and understood as such. This last aspect, however, has not always been honoured in the model of presence.

¹⁸ Rather than speaking about 'a theology of presence', Warren preferred the term 'theology of attention'. For a discussion of Warren's theology of presence and attention see G. Kings, *Christianity connected: Hindus, Muslims and the world in the letters of Max Warren and Roger Hooker*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer 2002, 122-133.

¹⁹ J. Verkuy, *Inleiding in de evangelistiek*, Kok, Kampen 1978, 128ff.; See also J. Dimnet, 'Towards the discovery of a genuine presence', *Student world*, 3 (1965), 225, 226.

²⁰ J. Ellul, *Staan in de wereld van nu*, Uitgeversmaatschappij Holland, Amsterdam s.n. (The original French title is called: *Présence au monde moderne*).

²¹ P. Potter, 'Editorial', *Student world*, 3 (1965), 210. Potter saw the concepts of 'God's Shekinah (Ex. 3:1-14) and Jesus as the Shekinah who had become flesh (Emmanuel) as the biblical foundations for his theology of presence.

²² General Committee Statement WSCF, 'The Christian community in the academic world', *Student world*, 3 (1965), 234. See also M.A. Thung, 'Christian presence and collective choices', *Student World*, 3 (1965), 274.

²³ D. Kerr, 'Christianity and Islam: an overview' in *Living among Muslims: experiences and concerns* 5 – 12 July 1987, Centre International Reformé, Genève 1987, 40.

²⁴ G.J. van der Kolm, *De verbeelding van de kerk*, 47.

²⁵ G.J. van der Kolm, *De verbeelding van de kerk*, 47, 48.

The model of dialogue

The last model that needs some discussion is the model of dialogue. It is that model which advocates an attitude of openness and respect to people of other faiths and the willingness of Christians to be challenged and changed in the encounter with people of other faiths, be it that the encounter takes place in an organised setting, be it that the encounter is the consequence of living in a plural religious society. The model of dialogue sees 'the other' first of all as a fellow pilgrim in the journey of life and as person who through his/her religion has some grasp of God, however partial is grasp may be.

Since the 1960s the term 'dialogue' has gained prominence in missiology.²⁶ At the Chiang Mai consultation of 'Dialogue in Community' in 1977 dialogue was affirmed as an authentic vocation of the Church, having its proper integrity alongside the many other specific ministries which the Church is called to fulfil in mission.²⁷ For the Roman Catholic Church the second Vatican Council formed a turning point in the relations with peoples of other faiths. *Nostra Aetate* was the first official document to use the term dialogue in relation to people of other faiths.²⁸ Both the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC have appreciated that dialogue is not just an occasion for mutual sharing and listening but also an event for mutual learning and enrichment.²⁹ In evangelical circles dialogue is regarded with suspicion. In the Frankfurt Declaration (1970) the evangelicals noted with concern that dialogue had replaced the proclamation of the gospel and stressed that dialogue is valid only in those cases where it serves as a preparation for witness.³⁰

Though for the larger part the Christian attitude towards people of other faiths has changed from confrontation to openness and respect, the relations between the religions are still contaminated by suspicion. Dialogue is considered as yet another method of conversion. So far, the model of dialogue has often been interpreted as a way to break down prejudices and to promote respect and peaceful coexistence. But these aspect only reflect part of the meaning of dialogue. The model of dialogue offers great opportunities for people of different religions to truly meet on the level of faith, rather than on the level of dogmatics, and to be enriched by this encounter. Very few people have dared to undertake the adventure to understand dialogue as an opportunity to be challenged and

²⁶ In some ways dialogue is not a new phenomenon. Verkuyl has pointed out that throughout history there have been people who have advocated a two-way rather than one-way communication in relation to people of other faiths and cultures. It seems fair however to state that in most cases this two-way conversation had an apologetic and/or polemic undertone. The dialogue was geared towards conversion rather than towards mutual understanding and mutual growth. J. Verkuyl, *Inleiding tot de nieuwere zendingswetenschap*, 488.

²⁷ V.E.W. Hayward, 'Three Kandy Meetings', *Study Encounter*, III/2 (1967), 55. D. Kerr, 'Christianity and Islam: an overview', 40, 41.

²⁸ K. Steenbrink, 'The mission of dialogue', 123.

²⁹ The WCC *Study Encounter* 'Living in dialogue' states: 'It involves an expectation of something new happening - the opening of a new dimension of which one was not aware before. Dialogue implies the readiness to be changed as well as to influence others.' V.E.W. Hayward, 'Three Kandy Meetings', 54.

³⁰ J.A.B. Jongeneel; J.M. van Engelen, 'Hedendaagse missionaire stromingen' in F.J. Verstraelen (ed.), *Oecumenische inleiding in de missiologie: teksten en contexten van het wereldchristendom*, Kok, Kampen 1988, 457.

changed and thus come to a deeper understanding of God. But interreligious dialogue unavoidable entails the chance of being challenged and the risk of becoming changed. But those who are not willing to be challenged, also deny themselves the chance of being enriched.

Kenosis

Yet, though these models have, apart from some drawbacks, also positive aspects, none of them seemed to express the atmosphere of the story I told earlier. Therefore I continue my search, which finally led me to the term *kenosis* as a helpful concept for relating to people of other faiths.

Kenosis is a relatively new word in missiology.³¹ The concept of kenosis refers to Jesus' self-emptying act in the incarnation as described in Philippians 2:5-11.³² Jesus, in his mission of reconciliation, emptied himself by sharing our humanity and by living among us, in order to show the love of God for humankind. The model of kenosis calls for imitation of the attitude of Christ's kenosis, in the context of a shared humanity.³³

Warren was one of the first who used the word kenosis in the context of relation to people of other faiths. As early as 1961 he called for an attitude of humility and self-emptying among missionaries, especially in relation to Muslims. To Warren kenosis meant the ability to 'identify' with the other person.³⁴ The same aspect of 'identification with the other' is highlighted in Yves Raguin's *I am sending you*.³⁵ Also David Bosch in *Transforming mission* links kenosis to 'his [Jesus] identification with those on the periphery'.³⁶ Identification with people on the periphery implies imitating Jesus' example of voluntarily laying aside power and status.³⁷ It is this voluntary act of self-emptying, that enables people to cross boundaries of power, caste, class, culture and religion.³⁸

Both Edward Matthew and Tariq Mitri point out that therefore kenosis involves a risk: the risk of rejection, the risk of suffering, the risk of having to give up pre-

³¹ Later this year D.N. Harmelink will publish his Ph.D. dissertation of 1997 entitled *Mission and kenosis*. Note: the term kenosis has been frequently used in the context of urban mission.

³² For exegetical and linguistic comments on kenosis see W. Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Walter de Gruyter, New York 1971, 846, 847; D. Müller; H.G. Link (ed.), *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, Wuppertal 1969, vol. II, 847-849; K.J. Kuschel, *Born before all time? The dispute over Christ's origin*, SCM Press, London 1992, 243-264.

³³ According to Matthew's Christ's actual act of kenosis was unique and inimitable. E. Matthews, 'Christ and Kenosis: a model for mission', *Journal of applied missiology*, 2/1 (1991), 1. The article was made available at the following website: www.bible.acu.edu/missions/page.asp?ID=415, Date: May 22 2003.

³⁴ M. Warren, 'The meaning of identification' in G.H. Anderson, *The theology of Christian mission*, SCM Press, London 1961, 231, 234.

³⁵ Y. Raguin, *I am sending you (John 22:21): spirituality of the missionary*, East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila 1973, 111, 112.

³⁶ D.J. Bosch, *Transforming missions: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, 513.

³⁷ L. Boff, *Church: charism and power*, Crossroad Publishing company, New York 1988, 64; E. Matthews, 'Christ and Kenosis: a model for mission', *Journal of applied missiology*, 2/1 (1991), 4; P.D. Niles, *World Mission today*, a paper presented at the Conference on World Mission and the Role of Korean Churches held in November 1995, Seoul, Korea, 17. See www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showarticle?item_id=127. Date: May 22 2003.

³⁸ M. Nazir Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian encounters*, Regnum Books, Oxford 1991, 74.

conceived ideas about what it means to be a Christian or to be a Christian community. But taking the risk is necessary, in order to be truly with the other.³⁹ According to Bosch, opting for kenosis as a model, means accepting the cost of discipleship.⁴⁰

In his book on missionary spirituality Raguin makes clear that kenosis does not just imply denouncement and sacrifice, even though kenosis reaches its height and depth at the cross. Kenosis also means ‘plenitude’:

Kenosis, then, places us in a state of receptivity. We develop an instinctive attitude of listening, trying to understand, letting ourselves be permeated with the atmosphere of our surroundings, passing beyond what is merely heard and seen to reach the personality of the people with whom we live, or those we may meet. In this way we learn to know others from within. (...) *Kenosis*, then, is the gateway to mutual understanding, and beyond this, to an intimate sharing that is the consummation of a relationship in union. (...) By dispossession of self we are able to absorb the amazing riches of others, the persons in themselves and as embodying a cultural tradition.⁴¹

Possibly Theo Sundermeier has this receptivity of kenosis in mind when he links the concept of kenosis to hospitality and hints at kenosis as a model for intercultural encounter.⁴²

Kenosis as the act of self-emptying does not demand surrender of one’s own identity. On the contrary, Raguin states: ‘Just as the Word, though emptied, did not cease to be the Word, so the missionary cannot cease being what he is.’⁴³ Recently, David Jensen has argued that this aspect of kenosis, being both radical openness towards and respect for the other while at the same time preserving one’s own identity, can serve as a christological basis for interreligious dialogue.⁴⁴

³⁹ E. Matthews, ‘Christ and Kenosis: a model for mission’, 2; T. Mitri, *Religious communities in minority situations*, *Procmura Newsletter*, 2/6 (1993), 2. Mitri uses the concept of ‘kenotic presence’ for the undertaking of this risk. Warren also shared this idea that incarnation might mean a complete revision of mission. In a letter of 1968 to his son in law Roger Hooker he writes: ‘I am more and more convinced that Incarnation means self-limitation and this is what letting Christ be in one in India means. It means restriction of activity. (...) I am deeply, deeply concerned that in India, in Africa, in Britain Incarnation means self-limitation, means being willing to make friendship the keynote of ministry. This in turn must mean the accent laid on small groups. The Institution is there and must in some fashion be served until such a time as God either removes it, as he has done in China, or renews it, perhaps by some unexpected change.’ G. Kings, *Christianity connected*, 216.

⁴⁰ Bosch, in his paper on the vulnerability of mission, highlights that kenosis is indissolubly connected to the cross. ‘The broken Christ is the one who heals the world.’ J.D. Bosch, ‘The vulnerability of mission’ in J.A. Scherer; S.B. Bevans, *New directions in mission and evangelisation*, II, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1994, 79. 80.

⁴¹ Y. Raguin, *I am sending you (John 22:21): spirituality of the missionary*, 111, 112.

⁴² T. Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen: eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen 1996, 208, 209. See also T. Sundermeier, ‘Inkulturation als Entäußerung (Inculturation as self-emptying)’, in J.A.B. Jongeneel, a.o. (eds.), *Pentecost, mission and ecumenism: essays on intercultural theology*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt 1992, 209-215.

⁴³ Y. Raguin, *I am sending you (John 22:21): spirituality of the missionary*, 110.

⁴⁴ D.H. Jensen, ‘The emptying Christ: a christological approach to interfaith dialogue’, *Studies in interreligious dialogue*, 11/1 (2001), 10. For Jensen this means that the kenosis of Christ ‘is the ground for openness to the religious other and the norm for assessing that other person’s religious claim.’ But this assessment of the other person’s religious claim is based on the presupposition that all our views of God

At an Aarhus conference Tinu Ruparell has presented kenosis as way to interact with 'the reluctant other'. He says: 'As I understand the doctrine, *kenosis* is not a self-denial in the sense of complete eradication, but rather a conscious opening up to the other in order to partially become the other.'⁴⁵ Thus kenosis enables people to establish contacts where contact is difficult or suspicious.

To recapitulate, the model of kenosis is based on the kenosis of Christ in the act of incarnation, in his mission to reconcile the world with God. Kenosis takes the context of a shared humanity as a starting point for establishing relationships. It is as a human being that Christ interacted with us. Likewise, it is first of all as human beings that people relate to each other. In this relationship the model requires an imitation of Christ's kenosis and combines the act of self-emptying with upholding one's own identity. The other person is taken seriously in the model of kenosis, both as a fellow human being and as a religious individual, while at the same time the model offers the possibility for being authentically different in religion, culture or personality from the person to whom one relates.

In the act of self-emptying the model of kenosis entails – as indicated by Ruparell⁴⁶ – a radical contextualisation (Ruparell even speaks of 'hybridization') in order to be able to identify with the other. This contextualisation encompasses culture (inculturation), religion (interreligious dialogue) and the socio-political setting (liberation).⁴⁷ Kenosis represents the willingness to be challenged and changed by the other in order to be with the other. The model of kenosis is therefore a relational model of being in community and in interaction with the other. Because kenosis calls for shedding one's once acquired status, flexibility and adjustment, model emphasises that not the self, the preservation of the community, the structure or the policy is important, but the other human being and his/her *shalom*.

In its willingness to seek the other, to respect the other in his/her culture and religion and in the encounter with the other, sharing our deepest convictions about God, the model of kenosis offers a paradigm for a joint human pilgrimage towards God. The Christian testimony on that pilgrimage is that of a God whose love for the world was so profound that he was willing to become human in Christ and die on the cross.

Concluding remarks

According to my observation, the model of kenosis links up with a world-wide lived reality that Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, African traditional believers etc perceive

are partial and need deepening. D.H. Jensen, 'The emptying Christ: a christological approach to interfaith dialogue', 20.

⁴⁵ The study project 'Theology Meets Multireligiosity', Aarhus University May 2002. See T. Ruparell, 'The dialogue party: dialogue, hybridity and the reluctant other' in V. Morgensen, *Theology and the religions: a dialogue*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2003, 235-249. See especially page 245.

⁴⁶ T. Ruparell, 'The dialogue party', 244ff.

⁴⁷ The setting for the model of kenosis is Christ's service of reconciling the world with God. The model of kenosis therefore demands the readiness to share oneself and one's resources and the courage to challenge the powers of injustice. In the model of kenosis servitude means identification with the powerless, the poor and the outcasts and serving them in all their needs, physical, social, political and spiritual. The ultimate aim is not just alleviation of needs, but a liberation of the injustices that discriminate some people and favour others.

each other first of all as fellow human beings, as neighbours, friends, colleagues or relatives with whom they share the ups and downs of life. It is the reality of going to school together, of participating in naming ceremonies, marriages and funerals, of tilling the same soil, of working in the same office and of suffering from the same diseases, the same draughts, and the same electricity cuts. It is on the basis of this shared humanity that relationships develop, friendships are built and faith is shared. The model of kenosis emphasises that it is in sharing life that the love of God is shared.⁴⁸

In the context of this shared humanity, the Christian relationship to people of other faiths takes the form of kenosis. The model sees radical self-emptying as a necessity to establishing meaningful relationships with people of other faiths and other cultures. It is only in true and radical openness to the other in the totality of his/her being and openness to his/her deepest motivations in life, that the witness of God's love for all people can be shared. Inculturation and interreligious dialogue therefore are not just optional for the interested few, but, according to the model of kenosis, they belong to the core of the Christian calling to imitate Christ in his self-emptying love for people. They are authentic expressions of the Christian identity. Understanding the culture, the religion, the socio-political framework of the other is crucial in the understanding of the other as a person and a prerequisite of sharing his/her life with him/her.

For Christians in The Gambia for example the model of kenosis offers a way of relating to the Muslim community and to the people of the African traditional religions with whom and among whom they live. Kenosis calls upon Christians to fully participate in the events of everyday life. This means that the participation in religious festivals, the eating of Tobaski meat, the joining in prayers while attending a funeral or the study of Islam or traditional religions, are no longer optional or even questionable activities. Rather, it belongs to the core of the Christian calling to participate in these crucial events in the lives of people, in trying to understand their deepest convictions and in inviting them to share in one's own life and one's own faith. It is in visiting Muslim friends at the end of Ramadan in order to congratulate them with the end of the fasting period and in celebrating the event with them and in inviting them to join in the Christmas celebrations and in the Good Friday dish of *nanburu*, that the other feels taken seriously, as a person and as a religious being. And it is this experience of being loved as a fellow human being in all dimensions that can enable the experience of the message of God's love for all human beings.

Thus, the model of kenosis, with its setting in God's mission of reconciliation, combines the positive aspects of the models of diakonia (service and the strife for justice and human rights), presence (the silent witness of life) and dialogue (openness and respect for others and the willingness to learn from the other), but firmly grounds it in the context of a shared humanity. It is there, in our shared lives, that the love of God for human beings, becomes visible and credibly. For it was in sharing our lives with us, even share death with us, that Christ showed God's love for the world

⁴⁸ It is this reality that e.g. the village catechist lives out daily. He works on the land, teaches in the school, eats the same food and visits his neighbours in the evenings. His presence in the village, his participation in the village life is in itself a sign of the love of God.

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